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ABSTRACT

A qualitative approach was used to explore the challenges and dilemmas faced by kindergarten teachers in Mexico as a result of recent K-9 curriculum reform. Influenced by the United States, the new curriculum emphasizes the development of academic skills and stresses the values of individualism and assertiveness. In addition, there is increasing pressure for "accountability." As a result of these changes, teachers are faced with the dilemma of administering a curriculum that emphasizes values that are in some respect opposite to the cultural traditions of Mexican families, with virtually no resources to support the effort. Data were collected from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis over an 8-week period. The kindergarten teachers participating in the study discussed their concerns regarding the conflicts between school and home, the lack of coordination among levels of education, and the change from a constructivist teaching approach to an outcomes-based approach. (Author/HTH)

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Curriculum Reform in Mexico: Kindergarten Teachers' Challenges and Dilemmas

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Abstract

This paper examines some of the challenges and dilemmas faced by kindergarten teachers in Mexico as a result of recent curriculum reform. Influenced by the United States, the new curriculum emphasizes the development of academic skills and stresses the values of individualism and assertiveness. In addition, there is increasing pressure for "accountability." As a result of these changes, teachers are faced with the dilemma of administering a curriculum that emphasizes values that are in some respect opposite to the cultural traditions of Mexican families, with virtually no resources to support the effort. The kindergarten teachers participating in the study discuss their concerns regarding the conflicts between school and home, the lack of coordination among levels of education, and the change from a constructivist teaching approach to an outcomes-based approach.

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In 1990, the Mexican Department of Education initiated an extensive evaluation of the national K-9 education program that led to the creation of a new curriculum. Implemented in March 1993, the new policy stressed the need to increase student retention, innovation, the development of children's academic skills, and the creation of national standards (Colosio, 1990; Beltran-Vera, 1990; Carranza, 1990). In addition, it attempts to decentralize education, modernize the distribution of educational functions, and encourages better collaboration between schools and families (Colosio, 1990). The policy also proposes to increase the national investment in education and make education responsive to the needs of the indigenous population (Carranza, 1990). As a result of the reform, all Mexican children must complete a year of kindergarten, six years of elementary school, and three years of middle school. To our knowledge, no study has been conducted examining the connection between kindergarten and elementary education in Mexico. In this paper, we describe the findings of a preliminary study on the dilemmas faced by kindergarten teachers and school administrators facing the new educational reform. The main questions addressed by the study were:

- What are the characteristics of kindergarten education?
- How is kindergarten taught?
- What are the dilemmas faced by kindergarten teachers in relation to the new educational reform?
- Are current political changes influencing in any way what happens in the schools? In what ways?

Methods

A qualitative approach was used to explore issues and dilemmas faced by different stakeholders regarding the implementation of the new K-9 curriculum. The data were collected over an 8-week period. The data consisted of semi-structured and open-ended interviews, focus-group interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis was organized around the main questions of the study (Stake, 1995).

The study was conducted in urban schools in southeast Mexico. The criterion for selecting schools focused on "What schools would help us to

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understand how well the new curriculum satisfies the needs of the different constituencies in a local community?" rather than "What schools represented the totality of the school types in the area?" Since the Mexican curriculum is highly centralized, this study in the southeast strongly reflects the curriculum being implemented in the schools of other Mexican states.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to collaborate in the study and their accessibility. The participants included the head of kindergarten education, school administrators, and kindergarten teachers. To validate our findings, we allowed participants to review the quotes and descriptions. We also used multiple data sources (observation, interviews, and document review).

Findings

Following is a brief description of preliminary findings that are organized around the main research questions.

What Are the Characteristics of Kindergarten Education?

According to official documents from the Mexican Department of Education, kindergarten education is designed to provide an opportunity for children to develop their creativity, their social skills, self-assurance, curiosity, and trust of their own abilities. In addition, children are expected to begin the development of their communication (oral and written) and mathematical skills. Kindergarten education also stresses the value of children's play and the role of children as primary actors in their own learning. By playing, "children explore and develop their physical and intellectual capabilities and reconstruct situations in their social and familial life. They also use their imagination, learn to appreciate the use of symbols, and develop their oral, graphic, and aesthetic skills."

The Department of Education as well as state and private organizations finance kindergarten education. Specific kindergarten programs have been designed for children of indigenous ancestry, and the Mexican state supports them financially. These programs are designed for children of diverse ethnic groups and are taught by bilingual teachers in the native language of the children.

In Mexico, there are three levels of kindergarten. The first level is for children who are between 48 and 52 months old. The second level is for children who are 53 to 59 months old. The third level of kindergarten is for children who are between 60 and 72 months old. With the reform, only the third level of kindergarten became required.

The new policy resulted in a change in the selection, preparation, and continuing education of teachers at the normal schools. Before the reform, preschool and elementary school teachers were prepared at the normal schools in a 4-year program after completing middle school. With the reform, teachers are required to complete high school before starting their professional training.

Prior to the reform, kindergarten education focused only on the social and affective development of children. Now, children are expected to acquire the basics for written and oral communication. (In some private kindergartens, children read and begin to write before entering elementary school.) According to the Mexican Department of Education, this requirement avoids the problem formerly faced in elementary school that takes place when children learn how to associate the letters with the sounds but they are not able to understand the meaning of sentences and words. The development of oral expression is necessary not only for academic purposes but also for improving children's social interaction outside the school. The development of early communication skills is especially important because of its relationship to later comprehensive learning of reading and writing.

Although elementary and middle schools are beginning to create school councils as a result of the reform, kindergarten schools have the same structure as they did before. In each school, there is a principal responsible for the administration and control of school finances as well as personnel administration, and a physical education and a music instructor who work with the teachers at the school. Each school district also has a superintendent who supervises technical, pedagogical, and administrative aspects of the schools; these supervisors are expected to serve as liaisons between the schools and the Department of Education. They are also expected to help schools

to adapt the national and regional policies to their particular needs at the school level.

How Is Kindergarten Taught?

Teaching activities are to be developed around four areas. The first area is *affectivity* and involves the development of the child's personal identity, the teaching of cooperation and participation, expression of affectivity, and development of child autonomy. The second area is the *social* area and involves teaching children social cooperation and participation, national values, and family and community traditions. The *physical* area involves children's learning about space and time relationships, corporal notions, and logic. Finally, the *intellectual* area focuses on the understanding and learning of symbolic notions, math, language abilities, and the construction of logic relations.

To support kindergarten teaching, the Department of Education has developed new educational guidelines, such as a manual of children's activities and games, a guide for teachers, and another guide for parents. The manual of children's activities is organized into five categories: (1) games and sensibility activities as well as artistic expression, (2) psychomotor skills, (3) children's relation to and understanding of nature, (4) math-related activities, and (5) communication activities (oral and written). The guide for parents stresses the importance of kindergarten education for children's development and the role of play in the learning process.

Kindergarten teachers have to prepare an annual proposal of activities and games. In this proposal, the instructor has to address each of the four areas and can use the manual for games and activities developed by the Department of Education. According to the Department of Education, teachers have the freedom to use the manual or to choose other activities that they consider appropriate for the children. As the head of kindergarten education interviewed mentioned:

> Teachers have the freedom to use the guides and manual developed by the Department of Education; they can also select other activities that they think are more adequate for their children's needs. In the proposal, instructors have to show how the child will be able to develop in each of the areas, how the teacher will actively involve the children in each of the activities, and how she will help them to develop their creativity and autonomy.

According to this official, teachers are given the freedom to adapt this plan to the needs of their students:

> The instruction is not rigid, the teacher observes, asks the children for their participation, and focuses on what is best for them. A good kindergarten teacher is flexible enough to work around her children's interests and experiences. She involves them in projects that allow children active participation in their learning.

One of the principals added:

> The four areas are covered in the three levels of kindergarten; they are adapted to children's development and needs. What you do depends on the children. You also try to give them the opportunity to select the activities they want to do, so while some draw, others dance, etc.

The teachers interviewed provided some examples of the kinds of activities that they develop when teaching the children:

> Teacher 1: I do various activities when working in the different areas. For example, when working in the affective area, I may have the kids prepare their genealogy tree. They bring pictures from home, and then each of them prepares his or her own story to share with the class.

> Teacher 2: In the affective area, we also teach children to work in groups, collaboratively. We ask them, for example, to do something for Mother's Day in groups or to decorate the school for Carnival. They have to set the rules of their team, divide tasks, and organize. It is not just to teach them how to do something, but you use the process to teach collaboration.

> Teacher 3: Sometimes I ask my kids to tell me how many blocks they walk from home, then as a class, we draw a map and we draw where their homes are. In this way, they learn more than one thing at the same time.

Teacher 1: Something that we encourage is the learning of cultural values and the importance of the community in the social area. We may organize field trips or ask the children to ask their parents to identify someone who is important in their community. Then, we invite that person(s), and the children interview the speaker. Of course, you have to work with the children first and ask them to think about what questions they would want to ask. Some children ask their parents for ideas, but many make up their own questions.

Teacher 2: I use drama and stories when I teach the children about history or cultural values. Children may know this is the month of our independence, but they may not be sure what that means. You can create graphs, use drawings or pictures to create a mural about a historic event. This month we have two important celebrations on September 13 and 16, so we ask the children to ask their parents what the difference is between the two and we start working from there...

Teacher 3: In the physical area, it is important for you to teach children about hygiene and about the environment. Sometimes you take them to the Red Cross; other times you have a speaker. There are so many things you can do...

Teacher 4: In the physical area, it is also important for them to understand time and space relationships. You use drama, stories, poems, and the news, or maybe you work with something that happens to one of the kids. You use the experience to make kids think about what happens before, after; what the consequences are. Young children do not perceive details, and here is where you can help by asking questions that make the children think about them. If you ask them to solve a problem, you ask them to think about the answers as well as to reflect on the choices they make, and the consequences.

Teacher 5: The intellectual area has become more important with the reform. In this area, we try to provide the basics for math and language learning. We may use drawings, riddles, games, tongue twisters. Children may already know some of the numbers, but you need to help them in relating numbers to objects. You can work with toys and make them count a collection; you can also keep them thinking about who did not come to class today and ask them to count how many are in class and how many are missing. We also organize the materials into areas and use this as an opportunity for teaching them addition and subtraction.

One of the principals who participated in the study also provided an example of an activity designed by one of her teachers:

> One of our instructors organized a math fair with her children. She is working with children whose average age is 5 years, 6 months. She asked the kids to investigate at home how math is useful to us. She then had the kids share their responses and used the group's thinking to identify some activities for the fair. Children were given the opportunity to choose an activity to illustrate how math is useful in their lives. Some children created a meter stick and began to measure different things; they also asked their classmates to guess what was longer or shorter. Another group started by weighing things; the kids brought different things such as candy, toys, etc. Then these groups weighed them with the teacher's help. At the end of this activity, kids built their own scales using a hanger and some soda caps. A third group played hopscotch with their classmates while counting. I especially enjoyed the theater presentation. This group of children decorated their own hall and decided to dramatize how math is part of their lives. They had a scene where the clock was ringing and their mother wakes them up to go to school. Another scene was about using money to pay for the bus or buying candy at a store. The best of all is that the children decided what they wanted to do, so it was more meaningful for them. This was a good way of teaching math as well as important for teaching them values such as collaboration, respect for other opinions, and so on.

What Are the Challenges Faced by Kindergarten Teachers in Relation to the New Educational Reform?

The teachers and school administrators identified challenges in relation to (1) role expectations and coordination between the schools and the Mexican Department of Education, (2) teacher and school traditionalism, (3) lack of continuity and compatibility between kindergarten and some elementary schools, (4) parents' negative preconceptions of kindergarten,

(5) limited resources, and (6) immigration and return migration issues.

Role expectations and coordination between the Mexican Department of Education and the schools. According to the Department of Education documents and the head of kindergarten education interviewed, one of the challenges confronted by kindergarten teachers is to recognize the capabilities of each child—to implement different activities that are flexible and appropriate for all children in her class—for small groups of children when working on teamwork activities and for individual children. Teachers also have to find new teaching alternatives when those used do not work well with the children. For all these reasons, kindergarten teachers have to be flexible enough to decide when and how to develop the classroom activities.

However, teachers felt that supervisors and Department of Education officials made it difficult for them to have this flexibility. As one teacher commented:

> In each school, there is a principal responsible for the organization of the school and its operation and management. Principals influence the activities that take place in the school. If they support the activities, there is no problem, but sometimes when an instructor wants to do something different, the principals do not encourage this. Indeed, although the Department of Education tells you that the manuals and guides are only suggestions, the reality is that they expect you to use the activities from the manual. They tell you that you can be creative and come up with other activities, but when you try to do so, you are discouraged.

One of the school principals mentioned:

> One of the strengths of the new curriculum is its continuity. Before the reform, we used to have a different educational policy and curriculum changes every time we got a new president. This has been the first time we have an educational reform that has lasted two presidential periods. The emphasis on an active role for children is also positive. However, one barrier that we face is the pressure for using the planned guides and manuals developed at the central level. While these guides are very good, there may be some occasions when students may need something different, something that is not included in the manuals.

Another instructor mentioned:

> Zone supervisors can also discourage you from trying something new. If they come to observe your class and they see you're doing something not included in the guides or the manual, they discourage you from doing it. The problem is that what you have decided to do may be more meaningful for the children than what is in the manual.

And another instructor added:

> You also struggle with the role expectations for children. We try to help children to be more independent and creative while teaching them to work collaboratively too. You struggle deciding how much you can do without creating a problem for the child when he goes to elementary school. In kindergarten, you also construct the curriculum around the child; in elementary school, the curriculum is already designed and rarely modified. You teach children to be independent, to come with different interpretations of different things, then they go to elementary school and this works against them. You want them to express themselves, to be creative, but when they go to elementary school, they want compliance. You also use poems, music, theater, and so many other things to teach them in kindergarten, but this doesn't always happen in the other levels of education.

Teacher and school traditionalism. Teachers and administrators stated that another challenge faced by kindergarten educators was the traditionalism of some elementary teachers and schools. As one of the instructors interviewed also commented:

> Although the new curriculum has been implemented since 1993, there are elementary schools where teachers do not involve children actively in their learning. In these cases, the transition from kindergarten to elementary school becomes more difficult for the children. If the elementary school teacher uses a traditional approach that expects a very passive role from the children, the kids suffer. We know various schools like this

> where the reform exists only on paper, but when the teacher is in the classroom, s/he keeps teaching as s/he has done it for 10 years...

Another teacher commented:

> We always receive comments from parents who tell us how children cry after a few weeks of elementary school; they ask their parents to send them back to kindergarten.

And another instructor continued:

> A few months ago, we were also told a very sad story of a little boy who graduated from our school. When he finished kindergarten, his parents put him in an elementary school that has a well-known reputation for its strong discipline. This little boy was very creative and active; he also had a lot of trouble adapting to his new school because that school uses a very traditional approach to teaching and has very strict regulations. In that school, children are not even allowed to run during their break. After a year, his parents put him in another elementary school. The new school has an approach to teaching that allows a more active role for children. The boy is doing well now, but the damage is already done; the child is now receiving self-esteem therapy. After he moved to his new elementary school, the parents came with the kid to our school because his sister is in the third-level of kindergarten. I remember I asked the little boy if he liked his new school; he told me that children in his new school may be crazy because they talk when the teacher is not in the room, they even move from their desks when the instructor is not around. You wish this didn't happen to any child...

A principal mentioned:

> Unfortunately, the traditional classroom remains a reality in many elementary and secondary schools. Not all teachers use active learning because this means additional work, or it is just a matter of teacher attitudes needing to change. Many of these teachers are used to lectures and ask children to reproduce knowledge rather than to construct it.

Continuity and compatibility between kindergarten and the elementary schools. Another aspect of the curriculum reform in elementary and middle school that is not very compatible with kindergarten is assessment. In kindergarten, student assessment is developed around children's learning and development, while in elementary and middle school, the reform encourages assessment based on certain predetermined objectives at the national level. The emphasis is not on the individual's or the group's needs but on the national standards. As one of the instructors mentioned:

> The way we develop our teaching plans and assess children in kindergarten is different from elementary school. In kindergarten, we spend the first 20 days of the year making a diagnostic of children's development and learning needs. Then, we develop a portfolio for each child and another for the group. Each portfolio includes different assessments and the instructor's observations. We do not use national or state standards to evaluate the children because each student and each group comes with different needs. The process is as important for us as the outcomes. But when the kids go to elementary school, things are different. The emphasis on outcomes in elementary school is putting pressure on kindergarten teachers to focus more on standardized outcomes than on the learning process.

Another possible incompatibility between the levels of education is the role of parents in the two levels of education. As a school administrator mentioned:

> In kindergarten, teachers have to work closely with parents. They need to establish close contact with them because this helps teachers to learn more about the child, about his/her family life, and the conditions under which the child lives. In elementary school, the role of parents is limited. They can participate in the PTA, but they are rarely allowed to be in the school unless they are invited.

And a teacher added:

> We work very closely with parents; we invite them to the school. They work with their children at home when we ask them to investigate something. They also come to the school and participate in different activities. In elementary school, parents are usually not allowed to go into the building during the school day.

Parents' negative preconceptions of kindergarten. Teachers and administrators stated that parents' preconceptions were another challenge for them when educating the children. As an instructor mentioned:

> Another barrier is parents' negative preconceptions of kindergarten. Some parents think that children come to kindergarten just to play; they have a problem seeing learning as fun, especially if they were taught in a traditional way and never studied kindergarten. So, you struggle trying to convince them that the kids are learning. Fortunately, over time, most parents value having their kids enrolled in kindergarten.

Another principal mentioned:

> Parents' beliefs are important; if the parents do not share the values taught to their children, it is a problem for the child to appreciate what s/he is learning. Parents are very important in making the work from school meaningful for their children. For example, we can get the children thinking about their communities and the environment, but if a family doesn't support these values, this does not promote children's learning.

Limited resources. Principals were especially concerned about the need for financial support and limited resources faced by their schools. They also added that these problems were made worse when the scarce resources led teachers to have limited expectations, especially when working in rural schools:

> Principal 1: The Department of Education pays teachers' salaries; schools can also request funding for improving their school and for building more classrooms. There are no resources, however, for materials that you can use for teaching. So the principals have to be creative in finding ways of obtaining funds to buy crayons, paper, glue, etc. Parents pay a small contribution, and this helps to buy these materials. The problem is that sometimes you cannot do many things because you just don't have enough resources. The good news is that teachers are so resourceful, they may use milk cans and paint them or create their own materials.
>
> Principal 2: In the rural areas, the conditions are worse. Schools and families have more limited resources, so it is harder for the instructor, although it depends a lot on the teachers.
>
> Principal 3: Some teachers have poor expectations when working with indigenous children in rural areas because of the schools' lack of resources. The children are less exposed to so many things, and they are very passive too. The problem is that if the teacher has low expectations this will not help the kids. There are no resources and, yes, you have cultural issues, but there are so many things you can do. One of our teachers was in a rural school before and received recognition for involving parents, community, and children in creating a garden with her school. Members of the community donated seeds and other harvest implements. The children worked with their parents and planted radishes, tomatoes, cabbage, etc. They later shared the fruits and vegetables among themselves and even organized a little farmers market to obtain some resources for their school. You can also use fruits and vegetables to teach the children addition and subtraction; you don't need to have something fancy to do that. You just have to adapt your teaching to the children's conditions.
>
> Principal 4: In rural schools, you also have to define the curriculum depending on children's needs. On one side, kids are more quiet and passive, but they are also more independent. Children walk to school on their own, which doesn't happen in the city. Teaching them to take care of their health is also more important in the rural areas.

Immigration and return migration issues. Because the community has been experiencing migration from their urban working class and some rural class citizens to the United States, teachers and administrators were experiencing some problems when children's language skills were below those of their peers or when they were not fully familiar with the cultural traditions of the community:

> Principal 1: In the past, you did not hear about people from this area immigrating to the United States. It tended to happen in other states, and usually the immigrants were people from the rural areas. The economic crisis of the country, however, changed that. I know about some neighborhoods where some members of a family left, and then gradually other neighbors followed

them. So, it is happening here too, and that brings new issues when teaching the children.

Principal 5: Some families leave and don't stay abroad. When they decide to come back, the children come to school with limited knowledge of Spanish. In kindergarten, it is not too much of a problem, but in other levels of education, such as elementary school or middle school, it may be a problem for the kids to keep up with their studies while working on their language skills.

Principal 4: It is not strange to hear that kids who study abroad do poorly because they are not used to our educational system, their language skills are not as strong as ours, and they sometimes are not fully aware of the cultural differences.

Principal 3: If the family has been abroad for too long or if the kids left at an early age, children become more acculturated to another country. Their families still keep some of our traditions, but the children are more used to the way they are expected to behave in the American schools. They also don't know how to interact well with their teachers and classmates. There are things that you don't read in books, such as how to interact with others or the intangibles of what is accepted or not. In kindergarten, we make a strong effort toward helping children to make an easier transition when they have been living abroad for a while, but it depends a lot on the school and the teachers. In other levels of education when educators are concerned about covering a certain amount of content or assessing outcomes, they may not be as supportive and this could affect the children's learning.

What Are the Dilemmas Faced by Kindergarten Teachers in Relation to the New Educational Reform?

The participants also indicated that they face dilemmas when the curriculum emphasizes values that are somewhat opposite to the cultural traditions of Mexican society, especially in the case of indigenous children. The principals and teachers who participated in the study expressed some concern regarding the emphasis of the new curriculum on assertiveness and individualism, especially in the case of indigenous children. As one of the principals who participated in a group session about the new K-9 curriculum mentioned:

> The emphasis on assertiveness can be problematic for some families, especially for those from rural schools. Rural schools have mostly children of indigenous ancestry whose families teach children to be obedient and respectful. If children become too assertive, this will be a problem because in their culture they are not supposed to question their parents' or teachers' authority. We can get in trouble because parents may think that we are trying to make children forget their traditions and challenge their parents' authority. Rural areas are usually more conservative too.

Another principal added:

> The way the curriculum is planned, it should not be a problem since we also encourage children's active participation in their learning. We also try to encourage them to investigate, and this is compatible with the goals of elementary school education. We, however, try to keep a balance between individualism and cooperation and focus on other important aspects of children's development, such as their social and affective skills.

The teachers also shared the principal's views, but they were divided in their opinions about introducing different values for the children, especially for those children living in indigenous communities. Some teachers saw the encouragement of assertiveness and individualism as positive because "this could help the children's possibilities of economic success within the main society." Other teachers, however, saw the change as contrary to the spirit of the reform. As one teacher mentioned:

> The reform is expected to be responsive to the needs of the different communities. The curriculum has included changes in the geography and history books, so they reflect more the context where children live. The problem with the emphasis on assertiveness and individualism is that ours is a society that sees individuals as part of a community for whom they have a responsibility. We teach our children to be autonomous but also to respect others and that their well-being is also related to the well-being of others. In the case of the indigenous children, changing them may

result in creating problems between school and home. Parents may think that we are also trying to change the children's faith by trying to introduce selfish philosophies that go against their beliefs and cultural traditions.

The dilemma of adopting new values is important not only for the participants in the study and other Mexican educators but also for other countries where policy makers, teachers, school administrators, and parents must decide about preserving the values of their students or trying to change them in order to prepare them for a "better" future. Addressing equity issues is something most educational systems aspire to, but how to address equity concerns can be problematic. Would equity be served by providing all children with the same knowledge and learning opportunities? Should knowledge be customized to a particular group? Should we change the values of children and their beliefs to increase their possibilities of economic success even if this change could result in the destruction of their own culture or the creation of conflict between their newly acquired beliefs and those of their parents?

Are Current Political Changes Influencing in Any Way What Happens in the Schools? In What Ways?

The teachers and principals interviewed consider that politics have influenced what happens in the schools in positive as well as negative ways. They give an example of how the recent elections are influencing some decisions that may not be in the best interest of the children:

Principal 4: Politics have a strong influence on what happens in education. Decisions about school funding or about what curriculum is covered tended to change with each presidential election. This is the first time a reform has lasted this long, so on the positive side, there has been some consistency. Some reforms are more sensitive to the differences among schools and the needs of diverse children than others. Some politicians educated abroad want just to replicate what they learned in other countries. The problem with this attitude is that something that worked well abroad may not work well for our context.

Principal 3: The recent elections have created a lot of stress for some schools because officials at the Department of Education are usually designated by the president. Since the new president belongs to a different political party, some new schools that don't have too many children are concerned about how to justify the number of teachers they have. They are worried that a change of this nature could affect their funding if they can't justify the need for having a certain number of teachers, etc.

Teacher 2: One of the problems with a political change in which the opposition wins is that there is a lot of anxiety when the school has not met all the requirements. For example, I know about two schools that have 10 to 12 children in each classroom and are worried that the new educational officials may not agree with this small class size. They fear the school may have to eliminate the number of groups and increase class size, which in the end will result in losing teachers. Now, they are accepting 3-year-old children to look as if they have enough children in the classroom. The problem is that these changes imply curriculum changes; you cannot teach 3-year-old children in the same way that you teach 4- or 5-year-olds.

Teacher 3: I know a school where the physical education teacher was usually absent; now he is there every day. He is even testing the children to learn if they are left-side dominant or right-side dominant and keeping a file on this. So, yes, some teachers fear that their work may be lost. They don't know what is going to happen.

Conclusions

The study illustrates some of the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in Mexico after the implementation of a new curriculum reform. Although some of these challenges may be unique to some particular schools, they have strong implications for Mexican institutions interested in improving the quality of kindergarten and elementary education. In addition, the study is of importance for U.S. schools with regards to reverse migration and standards-based education. Because Mexico is also one of the countries that provides the United States with a significant

number of immigrants, further studies could also look at the profound implications for the delivery of educational services for these children (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Moreno, 1991). The findings of the study may also, in turn, be used to facilitate future research on the knowledge, skills, and values promoted by the two educational systems and the use of strategies to better educate and place Mexican immigrant children (Moreno, 1991; Carter, 1996; Cisneros-Cohernour, 1996).

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